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JOINT COUNCIL UPDATE

JOINT COUNCIL ON FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES

Secretariat:

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U.S. Department of Agriculture
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Farm Bill Strengthens Council Role

The Joint Council takes on primary responsibility for bringing about more effective research, extension, and teaching in the food and agricultural sciences under Title XIV of the 1981 Farm Bill. Congress has called on the Joint Council to improve planning and coordination of publicly and privately supported food and agricultural science activities and to relate Federal budget development and program management to these efforts.

Under the new legislation, the Council will have at least 25 members, with half the members representing land-grant institutions and two members representing other colleges and universities. Secretary Block will appoint the new members.

The Secretary also is authorized to appoint a full-time staff to support Joint Council and Users Advisory Board functions and appropriations are authorized for staff support.

Agenda Committee Identifies Thrusts

The 1982 Agenda Committee, chaired by J.P. Jordan, has identified areas for Joint Council emphasis in the coming year.

The primary focus for the Council in 1982 will be the Farm Bill-mandated needs assessment and strategic plan and its associated implications for the food and agriculture science and education sector. The Council will play a stronger role in the development of the Federal budget recommendations through this process.

Major issues of continuing concern to the Council, and likely to be addressed through the assessment process will include: (1) agricultural marketing policies and problems; (2) agricultural productivity and its relationship to soil and water conservation; (3) technology transfer; (4) human expertise development for food and agriculture science and education; (5) postharvest technology; (6) international concerns; and (7) credit.

The Agenda Committee also recommended that the Council further develop its relationship with the Secretary's office and work to identify key policy issues to be acted upon by the Secretary and the science and education community in 1982.

Science and Education: Progress, Policy Issues, and Challenges Ahead

During its January meeting, the Council discussed numerous science and education policy issues and challenges.

Anson Bertrand, cochairman, unable to address the Council due to inclement weather, later submitted to the Council a status report on science and education. Bertrand charged the Joint Council to take strong leadership in charting a course for the agricultural research and education system in these difficult times.

He said that the Joint Council's perspective on food and agriculture must be that of the total science and education system and its primary concerns should be major issues which impact the total system. The Joint Council must become the Nation's leading advisory council for food and agricultural sciences. It must address broad issues and take steps to insure that the best and highest quality information is available to carry out this role. Bertrand underscored the challenge to demonstrate wisdom in use of scarce resources for research, extension, and higher education and among the various program areas.

He urged the Council to help all components of the food and agriculture system work more harmoniously together, to develop better information gathering and delivery systems, to work cooperatively on the congressionally mandated needs assessment and strategic plan, and to determine how to effectively deal with current shortages of trained expertise. Bertrand pointed out that the Council has an exciting opportunity to provide leadership in the research and education system and should use the Council structure as a vehicle to influence the resolution of pressing policy issues.

John Stovall, Executive Director, stressed that many issues facing the system can best be addressed collectively since the success of each component directly impacts all other components of the system. He cautioned the Council to be sensitive to the current economic and political environment. Problems Stovall feels the Council must face collectively include: (1) developing an adequate information base about the size, scope and content of program; (2) determining how much planning and coordination are needed in the system; (3) defining the current and future role of USDA in this system; (4) increasing public understanding of the system and its accomplishments; (5) maintaining and improving linkages between components of the system.

Richard Lyng, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, challenged the Council to bring together the viewpoints of agricultural leaders in research and education to assist the Secretary as difficult decisions are made in the future. He told the Council that:

- This Administration hopes to improve basic agricultural research and basic scientific understanding.
- Mission-related research must continue, but applied research that other organizations could conduct will be dropped.
- The new tax laws will hopefully set the stage for additional private research and development.
- Science and education interests are represented in the 1983 budget, but in times of inflation, allocations probably do not represent real growth.
- Although appointing an Assistant Secretary for science and education is high priority, it will most likely be a lengthy process.

Farm Bill Calls for Needs Assessment; Other Council Reports

Reflecting a concern to improve the long-range planning of the agricultural science and education community, Title XIV now requires that the Secretary of Agriculture conduct a "long-term needs assessment for food, fiber, and forest products, and determine the research requirements necessary to meet the identified needs." The Secretary has asked the Joint Council to conduct the assessment, which is due January 1, 1984. In addition, the Council is required by the new legislation to submit: (a) annual recommendations of priorities for research, extension, and teaching in June; (b) an annual progress report on research, extension, and teaching, and future expectations in November; (c) a 5-year plan for food and agricultural sciences in research, extension, and teaching by June 30, 1983, to be updated every 2 years.

A core staff of four will work on these reports concurrently. The oversight committee spearheading this effort includes: Robert Buckman, Forest Service; Mark Buchanan, Director-at-Large, Western Agricultural Experiment Stations; Craig Oliver, Director, Maryland Extension Service; Allan Goecker, Assistant Director for Higher Education, Science and Education. This oversight committee will report to the Joint Council Executive Committee.

All reports will follow the common program structure recently adopted by the Council and will be directed toward the science and education community, Congress, the Administration, and the public. As currently proposed:

- The Needs Assessment for food, fiber, and forest products would be broad in scope, primarily a synthesis of existing data from priority-setting studies, and examine 10 to 15 major long-range challenges for the food and agriculture science and education system. The report would provide the long-term goals for the 5-year plan.
- The 5-Year Plan will include long-range strategies to meet needs for food, fiber, forest and range products, and define measurable goals for the food and agricultural science and education system in the next 5 years with suggested resource allocations.
- The Annual Priorities Report will relate to goals outlined in the 5-year plan. It will delineate programs and priorities for the next 1 to 3 years and recommend levels of financial, manpower, and other support.
- The Annual Accomplishments Report will cite food and agriculture science and education yearly accomplishments that relate to goals in the 5-year plan and Annual Priorities report.

Consultation and review will be sought from the Joint Council national committees and regional councils; ECOP, ESCOP, RICOP, ASCUFRO; the Users Advisory Board; 1890 Schools; home economics; veterinary medicine; OMB; OSTP; AASCU; OBPA; and other Federal agencies.

National Extension Committee Meets with Council

The National Extension Committee met on January 12 and then met with the Joint Council on January 13. Bud Amburn, chairman, reported on NEC progress. Last year NEC looked at: the potential for using computers for research-extension linkages, the need for

national computer coordination and cooperation with the ECOP task force on computers; the relationship between extension programming and the research base from which it draws; and the increasing need for innovative extension energy programs.

Amburn recognized the need for additional coordination among extension, teaching, and research amidst shrinking budgets and cited the NEC's desire to promote the importance of extension's mission.

Council Explores New Horizons in Technology Transfer

The Joint Council, in its meeting with the National Extension Committee, reviewed ongoing efforts to speed the technology transfer process in food and agriculture.

Robert Kramer, Kellogg Foundation, painted the following scenario for 1990: three-fourths of all mid-size farms in the U.S. will use computer software in making management decisions and most will have their own computers; 90 percent of county extension offices will have a computer and an extension agent who is a computer expert; computer experts will be employed at the district and State levels; on-campus interdisciplinary computer coordination will increase; in U.S. agriculture the end-users--farmers--will know more about computer programs and use computers more frequently than their counterparts in other industries.

Kellogg expects to fund a regional feasibility study in the West and maybe the South; regional computer institutes or centers in the South, Northeast, and West; 8 to 10 more State projects; a National Computer Center; computer workshops and conferences in each State to share the experiences learned; and speakers at regional meetings in the Northeast.

Kramer encouraged the Joint Council and its National Extension Committee to support the coordination of computer work in USDA; support the National Computer Committee of ECOP and help implement its recommendations; and encourage Congress to provide funds to USDA and State extension services and experiment stations for computer equipment, personnel, and training programs for farmers and other extension clientele.

Denzil Clegg, Associate Administrator, Extension Service, said that computer programs used to speed technology transfer must be based on people's needs. ECOP's computer task force has identified the following needs: (1) help from the national level in assessing the national data base; (2) policies to facilitate coordination between States; (3) an on-line software library; (4) region-to-region coordination; (5) statements of missions and goals; (6) idea exchange; (7) staff development; (8) hardware evaluation, documentation; (9) legal consultation; (10) better relationships with the commercial sector.

Dan Moore, Associate Professor of Rural Sociology, Pennsylvania State University, reported that a study on the transfer of agricultural and related technologies will be conducted at Pennsylvania State under a USDA contract. The study will help government and universities see how organizational linkages can be improved to speed technology transfer.

Terry Kinney, Administrator, Agricultural Research Service (ARS), cited the complexity and varying rates of speed of technology transfer. Economic motivation may hasten technology transfer at an alarming rate, or it may take place in small increments over many years.

The rate at which American agriculture has adapted to technological change is unparalleled in any other major economic sector. USDA has an effective system of using basic research findings to develop technological improvements that can be put to work almost immediately.

Even though the USDA agricultural system is often studied as a model, improvements must be considered. For example, if ARS moves toward a primarily basic research organization, what major gaps will result in technology transfer and innovation? Will industry pick up basic research findings where ARS leaves off? Who will carry innovations through the "grey area" before they become economically profitable? What about transfer of information to and from non-agricultural groups?

James Anderson, Council cochairman and Dean of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University, commented on research-extension linkages and how they can facilitate or impede technology transfer.

In times of shrinking budgets, the clout of a university agricultural program is related to the unity of teaching, research, and extension efforts. We need a partnership, rather than just a series of linkages between programs.

Research-extension coordination at the Federal level has improved in the recent past. New systems for coordination between agriculture and other departments at the university level must be built as we pursue new areas like genetic engineering where potential payoff for agriculture is vast.

As we look to the future, a strong partnership is needed. We will not be able to function effectively with as much independence of research, extension, teaching, and international efforts as we have in the past.

Inventory of Federal Science and Education Programs

Ernest Corley, Chief, Science and Education Coordinating Office, reported on an inventory underway to increase understanding of systemwide food and agriculture science and education programs.

Data from the study show expenditures of 36 Federal agencies outside the USDA broken down by research, extension and teaching, and common program structure categories.

A similar inventory will be done for USDA agencies engaged in science and education activities.

1981 Annual Report of the Joint Council

The 1981 Annual Report of the Joint Council to the Secretary of Agriculture is available from Susan Schram, Executive Secretary, Joint Council, 351-A, Administration Building, Washington, D.C. 20250.

